



# PRESS RELEASE

## U.S. EMBASSY RANGOON

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### **Ambassador Mitchell Leads Delegation on Visit to Rakhine State**

Rangoon, March 15, 2013 – U.S. Ambassador Derek Mitchell traveled to northern Rakhine State on March 11-12 to assess the situation in areas that were affected by communal violence in June and October 2012. USAID Mission Director Chris Milligan and U.S. Embassy officer Cecily Brewer also joined the delegation. The deputy ministers from the Ministry of Border Affairs and Ministry of Immigration, and an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, took part and facilitated the visit.

Over the two days, the delegation met with a broad spectrum of representatives from affected communities. Delegates visited political party representatives, civil society leaders, UN humanitarian and human rights organizations, mosques, monasteries, and IDP camps in Sittwe and Pauktaw. They consulted with the Chief Minister of Rakhine State and the Speaker of the Rakhine State Hluttaw (Parliament).

Ambassador Mitchell discussed ways to achieve lasting security and stability in Rakhine State, means to rebuild trust between communities, access for organizations providing humanitarian assistance, and greater freedom of movement to allow communities to take back control of their lives and livelihoods. He indicated that conflict only hinders the development of Rakhine State, and noted that humanitarian aid would benefit communities according to need without regard to race, religion or other factors.

Ambassador Mitchell and Chris Milligan were encouraged that Rakhine Buddhist IDPs appeared to be on a path toward resettlement from camps to permanent homes. They found that camps containing Muslim communities were far less developed, and often in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The coming of the rainy season only adds to the sense of urgency over conditions, particularly shelter. The United States awaits with great interest the findings and recommendations of the upcoming Rakhine Commission final report, and the response by the government to the issues at play in Rakhine State that conforms with law and international standards.

Since June 2012, inter-communal conflict in Rakhine State has resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives, destroyed thousands of homes, displaced at least 115,000 people, and disrupted livelihoods of countless others. The United States has coordinated with the international community to mobilize a response to meet the needs of communities affected by the conflict and will continue to underline the urgency of that response in the coming months. The United States has provided more than \$7 million in humanitarian assistance since June 2012 to address the shelter, food, nutrition, and water and sanitation needs of the IDPs. The delegation also included officials from the British and Australian Embassies.

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